

# Old landfill still threatens Highway 3 near Gorst Creek

■ *Officials can't find the money to stabilize an old garbage dump on the waterway.*

**By Christopher Dunagan**  
Sun Staff

In 1997, residents living near Gorst Creek in South Kitsap knew something was wrong when tons of garbage — including an odd assortment of paper and plastic — washed downstream during a week of rainstorms.

What triggered the event was a mammoth

wall of floating garbage, which nearly wiped out Highway 3 north of Bremerton National Airport. That's where the south fork of Gorst Creek runs under the highway.

The garbage originated in an abandoned landfill just upstream of the highway. Years ago, the landfill operator directed the creek through a culvert at the bottom of a ravine, then filled the ravine with trash.

Now, five years after the trash started flowing into the creek, little progress has been made to stabilize the trash heap. Local officials are more worried than ever.

"It could blow out Highway 3," said Jan Brower of the Bremerton-Kitsap County Health

District.

It nearly happened during the heavy rains of early January, she said. The culvert under the landfill was not big enough to handle the heavy flow of water. The landfill became a dam, and water started spilling over the top.

"We had water 40 feet deep and 100 feet upstream from the landfill," Brower said. "Once it dislodges all that junk, it could literally blow out the highway."

The resulting flood could have created a serious risk to life and property, possibly all the way to Sinclair Inlet.

See **LANDFILLS** on A6

**A6 ■ SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2002**

## LANDFILLS

from Page A1

The discouraging thing, said Brower, is that nobody has the money to fix the problem.

The landfill is adjacent to a longtime auto-wrecking yard, which has gone by the name Ames Auto Wrecking, Bremerton Auto Wrecking and Airport Auto Wrecking.

At the time of the collapse, the landfill was owned by Lucile Uhinck, widow of former operator Sid Uhinck. The county sent her letters, but she had no money to fix the problem. Her son, Rick Uhinck, tried without success to obtain state and federal emergency grants.

Rick said his mom spent thousands of dollars on the problem before she stopped

paying the taxes on the landfill. The property was sold by the county last year to pay off the tax debt.

Brower said the new owner, Vern Padgett of Tacoma, told her that he bought the property without inspecting it, and he did not know about the landfill.

Padgett could not be reached for comment.

The Navy, which had dumped trash at the site for several years, funded some initial studies of the problem but pulled out about a year ago.

Washington Department of Ecology intends to rank the landfill as a hazardous site. Local health officials proposed a ranking of "1" — the worst possible on a scale from 1 to 5.

The recommendation was based on chemical information obtained from the Navy studies, which showed elevat-

ed levels of the insecticide DDT as well as mercury and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, which may be found in solvents and gasoline.

Even if the property qualifies for Ecology's toxics cleanup program, it could take years to work through the legal issues, Brower said.

If a public agency, such as the county, were to become involved, she said, the state could provide matching dollars.

"If we could just get measures in place to prevent a significant backup, we may be OK for the short term," she said.

Brower intends to call a meeting with agencies concerned with the issue, including the Navy; Kitsap County; Bremerton; and state departments of Transportation, Ecology, and Fish and Wildlife. The meeting is expected to take place in the next few weeks.